No. 46

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"Oh, Victor!" she gasped breathlessly. "How I have worried about you. My stepmother locked me in my room to prevent me from coming to you."

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IT WAS quite natural that the young Mrs. Harding should be surprised at her father's statement. Could it be possible that he had done everything to find her? If this was the case, why had she never heard from him? And why had all of her letters remained unanswered.

There was indeed food for thought. It was very disagreeable food for thought. Before she could speak she heard her father's voice anew.

"Yes, my dear child," he was saying in a weak voice. "It was my intense and constant longing for you that finally shattered my health."

An anguished cry broke from Betty. She arose excitedly and gazed at her father in bewilderment.

"Father—do you mean—you have long since forgiven me—that you have searched for me? And I—I lived in fear that you were still angry with me—that you would have nothing to do with me! Oh, why did I not know this——"

A warning cough from Alice surprised the poor woman and she stopped. She was suddenly reminded of the promise she had given her sister to keep silence.

How near she had been, in her justifiable indignation, to betraying her secret and disclosing all!

Confused and dismayed, she looked over toward Alice and a suspicion dawned upon her that her own sister had shamefully and treacherously deceived her.

But she cast the thought from her — she would not further pursue the idea. "Sufficient unto her," was the present. Impulsively she again threw her arms about her father's neck and clung to him tenderly.

"Let us forget the past, father," she said softly. "I have you again, and nothing will ever part us while we live. Indeed, my happiness to-day is too great—it overwhelms me. Phil told me that you have also for-

given my husband, whom God in His goodness has spared for me."

"Yes, my child," he answered. "Your husband has won my heart and I love him as if he were my son. I have only lately learned to appreciate his noble character and realized how worthy he is. Oh, Betty, if I had only done this before; how much heartache and worry would have been spared us all!"

"Hush father; let bygones be bygones—we must forget the past! But when shall I see Bob? I heard he was not in Chicago."

"I have had him notified that I must see him without delay. No reason has been given him, but I know he will obey my call at once. We may expect him in the morning."

Apparently Mr. Procter could bear up longer against sorrow than joy, for the ecstacy of having Betty again and his gladneses at seeing Alice in the house once more, proved a little too much for his physical strength.

Weak under the strain, but supremely happy, he dropped back upon the pillows and lay quietly for a few minutes with closed eyes.

Betty's delicate, transparent hand gently stroked his faded old face. He was quickened; a tremor of delight passed through him like an electric current. His hunger for filial affection was being satisfied.

There was something so soft and soothing about her gentle hand—something wonderfully loving in her touch. The old man's lips parted in a happy smile.

After a while, his eyes opened and his glance sought Alice who had held back all the time.

He motioned her to come to him and his face became darkened as if she were a cloud obscuring the sunlight of his happiness.

"You have hurt me terribly, child—terribly," he

said, "and you have hurt him—Phil—more. You have a great debt to repay, Alice. Prove to him that your repentance is sincere and that your love for him is true. Who knows how long I have still to live; let me pass my last few days in happiness.

"I will try to forget all you have done because you have brought back your sister for whom I have been pining. Now do everything you can to be worthy of your husband's forgiveness!"

Alice bent over her father and kissed him.

It was necessary to keep him in the belief that her penitence and remorse were heart-felt, for if he realized the true state of affairs, she knew that the old man's ideals of honorable dealing would prove disastrous to her plans.

He was too weak to say more. Holding Betty's hand in his, he dozed away; and Dr. Van Buren came to the bedside.

With a silent, cordial pressure of the hand, he greeted Betty. A cold, formal bow was his greeting to Alice who, in apparent emotion, had seated herself in a chair at the foot of the bed.

Then he busied himself with his patient; taking his pulse and listening to his heart-beat. When his examination was finished, he went to Gordon and whispered in his ear:

"Thank God, his slumber is deep and quiet—we can hope again. His pulse is stronger and much more regular. I think he will have a quiet night and we need not worry."

"Let me spend the night here," begged Betty eagerly. "My happiness is too great—I could not sleep anyway."

And so she remained at her father's bedside while the others retired.

When Alice had bolted the door of her room behind her, she indulged in bitter and sarcastic laughter.

"I shall not be posing as a repentant sinner for father for a very long while. The fact remains, I am here again just where I wanted to be, and can shape my own destiny from now on just as I wish."

Chapter 149

"GET OUT OR I'LL KILL YOU!"

IT WAS hardly fair to Marie Desmond that she should have been kept in ignorance of the new developments in the Gordon home. She should have been informed because the return of Phil's wife affected her future. She knew that old Mr. Procter's health had broken down rather suddenly, and that Dr. Van Buren was treating him.

But further than that she knew nothing. After a somewhat trying day with the children she was soundly asleep when Phil arrived at Oak Manor with Alice and Betty.

She got the first inkling that something out of the ordinary had taken place when she walked into the nursery the next morning.

To her surprise she found that both of the children had already been dressed and were eating their breakfast.

"Oh, am I so late, Annie?" she said to the latter, who was busy straightening up the room.

"No, you are no later than usual," the girl answered as she turned her worried face to the governess. "I was anxious to get the children out of here before you came, Miss Desmond."

Marie had walked over to the window. She turned sharply when she caught the troubled tone in the speaker's voice.

"Why, what is the matter, Annie?" she inquired anxiously.

The maid did not reply for a long moment. Ap-

parently she dreaded to say what was on her tongue. At last she blurted out:

"She came back last night."

The governess did not have the least idea whom the girl meant.

"Who came back, Annie?"

"That woman."

Marie did not have to make further inquiries. The manner in which the two words were uttered made it painfully plain.

"You mean to tell me that — that Mrs. Gordon came back?" she said, her features pale with dread. "I suppose she is the one you refer to, isn't it?"

"Yes."

For some time the governess was at a loss what to say. It was a terrible blow to hear that her worst enemy had come to dwell again with her under the same roof.

Had she come of her own free will, or had Phil gone after her?

It seemed hardly possible that Phil could have made an attempt to be reconciled with Alice.

Only a week ago he had expressed himself at being delighted with the conditions in his household. And while he had not said so in plain words, he had given her to understand that he felt elated at his wife's continued absence.

"Why, it is all so strange," she murmured. "How did it come about, Annie? Do you know?"

Annie nodded her head in the affirmative.

"I got all the information from the dining room girl this morning early," she declared. "Alice wrote a letter to her father telling him that she was very sorry for all she had done and begged him to intercede for her with Mr. Gordon. She promised to behave herself and

that she would bring back her younger sister Betty, who was the old gentleman's pet.

"Mr. Gordon refused to listen to his father-in-law. Then Mr. Procter took sick and Dr. Van Buren had to be sent for." Annie paused, tears choking her voice. "Oh, I can not go on;" she wept.

"But why not?" Marie said. "You might as well tell me the rest and prepare me for what is to come."

"That's just it," sobbed the girl. "What is to come. One of the conditions that woman named was that you must leave the house. And I can not bear to think of it, Miss Desmond."

The latter gasped with astonishment and pain.

This thing did not seem possible. Further questioning of Annie brought out every detail of the agreement, under pressure, between old Mr. Procter and his son-in-law.

Marie's eyes flashed fire.

"I won't leave!" she exclaimed, a wave of anger sweeping over her. "I won't. That woman has no right——" But here she stopped and bowed her head.

For the moment she had forgotten that she had absolutely no chance to fight Alice. She was Phil's wife in the sight of the world, if not in the sight of Heaven.

Alice, by law, was the rightful mistress of Oak Manor if her husband chose to take her back.

Annie walked up to the unhappy woman and looked into her eyes.

"You can stop this, and you must do it," the girl urged. "I have kept your secret long enough. You are the real Mrs. Gordon and that woman is an imposter. Go to your husband and reveal yourself."

"That would be madness," Marie responded quietly. "Just think for a moment what that would mean. I love Phil far too well to expose him to the ridicule of

his many friends. And there are the children. They must be considered.

"Do you think I would have them know that their mother played the part of an ordinary schemer?

No. I must remain a stranger to those I love until God sees fit to give me leave to speak."

The girl, utterly discouraged at failure to persuade the first Mrs. Gordon to reveal herself, wept anew.

"If you leave, I'll go with you," she threatened.

Marie, the stronger in this crisis, shook her head and smiled pitifully.

"Listen, Annie," she said, her voice soft with emotion. "You have been my one help and solace through the miserable days past. When I returned as Marie Desmond, you were first to recognize in me your former mistress. I confessed the truth because I knew I could trust you.

"That I must leave, is unfortunate for me. God knows it will be hard for me to leave my children. They both need me. After all is said, Phil is married to another woman. I have no right to disturb their domestic peace.

"There was a time when I thought I had every right to fight for my own in this house. But that time has passed when Phil agreed to take Alice back.

"I—I am glad you warned me of what I have to expect," she ended with a suppressed sob. "I'll prepare to leave before they have a chance to bid me go. I hope and pray that I will not meet Phil again face to face, for I could not speak to him without breaking down."

The only answer the faithful Annie made was to throw herself in her former mistress' arms and weep.

For some little time neither spoke. Marie raised the girl's head and forced her to meet her eyes.

Impulsively, and with mutual consent, their lips

met. It was the kiss of real friendship.

It was the kiss of blind devotion given by a servant to the woman she adored as her superior.

"Now, please dry those tears, dear," Marie coaxed. "You know that hope forever dwells in the human heart. "Who knows what may happen within the next year. It is not nearly so bad as we imagine."

"Oh, but it is," the girl quailed.

"Not at all," the other woman persisted with forced cheerfulness. "No matter where I go, I'll keep in touch with you. And you must promise me one thing right now: never, under any condition leave this house. I shall not have another peaceful hour if you go.

"The children I entrust to your care. Don't allow that woman to meddle. If she does, and tries any of her tricks, let me know at once. If the health and moral welfare of my children are threatened, I'll come back.

"And when I do come back, the second Mrs. Philip Gordon had better look to herself. I'll strip her of home and friends. I'll——" Marie paused, out of breath.

During this long speech she had become more and more excited. But she calmed down quickly.

"But you'll stay, for my sake, won't you, Annie?" she pleaded once more.

"I will," promised the girl, her lips drooping pathetically at the corners.

Before either of them could speak again, a knock came on the door. Marie opened to find herself face to face with one of the other maids.

"Mrs. Gordon sent me here to tell you that she wants to see you at once in her boudoir," the girl announced rather stiffly. "And she also told me to say that she does not enjoy being kept waiting."

"Very well," Marie answered. "I'll call on Mrs. Gordon within the next few minutes. Please tell her

so."

As soon as the door closed she looked at Annie.

The latter's face had gone deathly white, and for a moment it seemed that she was about to faint. Marie quickly led her to a chair and procured the smelling salts.

"This won't do at all, my dear friend," she said, trying vainly to keep her voice under control.

Annie smiled wanly.

"Oh, I am so sorry that you have to go to that woman," she replied. "I can well imagine why she sent for you. She wants the pleasure and satisfaction to discharge you."

"Why deny her that?" said Marie. "Someone has to tell me that my services are no longer required in this house. I would a thousand times rather have her do it than my—than Mr. Gordon.

"Perhaps he also dreads the ordeal and asked his wife to undertake the task. Well, I am ready and anxious to have it over with. Now don't worry for a second on my account. I am not afraid of that woman."

In her boudoir Alice was reclining on the couch, her eyes fixed expectantly at the door.

The moment she had longed for had come at last. The woman she hated was at last at her mercy.

"Now is my chance to show her who is the mistress of this house," she hissed through her clenched teeth.

A moment later the door opened and Marie entered, calm and perfectly composed.

There was nothing on her lovely features that betrayed what was going on in her mind. Her lips were curled in a half smile.

"You wanted to see me, I believe, did you not, Mrs. Gordon?" she inquired languidly.

"Yes. I want to see you," Alice snorted.

"Oh, I am so sorry that you had to disturb me," Marie spoke again, and with insulting coolness. "You see, I am so busy packing my things. Perhaps you do not know that I am leaving to-day."

Alice was beside herself with fury.

She had expected this governess to beg for another chance when she was told to go.

But instead she came already preparing to go, and in an attitude which showed absolute indifference if not joy. For a few seconds she could not find a fitting retort.

"May I ask you why this sudden departure?" she cried, her voice acquiver.

"Yes, you may ask, but I do not feel inclined to answer that question," was the exasperating retort. "You see, I really do not have to work for a living. Perhaps you were ignorant of the fact that a dear uncle of mine who died in South America left me a fortune."

Marie seemed to be enjoying her bitter enemy's discomfiture and obvious chagrin.

And although her heart was near the breaking point, she did not allow the half smile to leave her face.

"Is that the only reason for your leaving?" Alice demanded, hardly able to control herself.

"Oh, there is another, and I'll tell you if you really wish to know," came back slowly. "I am leaving also to avoid being ordered around by a woman of your type. You are not fit to have decent people work for you."

Alice shot up from the couch like a sky-rocket.

"How dare you insult me?" she screamed. "How dare you!"

Marie stood her ground without moving an eyelash and looked Alice straight in the eyes.

"Among the circle of my acquaintances there are

some women who can not be insulted," she retorted, uttering every word clear and distinct. "You are one of them, Mrs. Gordon."

The latter staggered as if she had received a blow in the face.

She was ready to commit murder, and she would probably have done the governess bodily harm but for the consequences.

The pallor on her face was ghastly to behold, and her lips lay straight across her teeth.

"If you do not leave this house within the next hour, I'll have you thrown out by the servants!" she gasped, clutching at the back of a chair to steady herself.

With measured steps Marie walked toward the door. Before she opened it to go, she turned.

"I doubt very much if any servants in the house now would do that for you," she remarked icily. "The one whom you might have bought to do the dirty work for you is no longer here. I am speaking of your old friend Nora Evans now."

Three leaping steps brought the second Mrs. Gordon to the side of the speaker.

"Get out—get out, or I'll kill you!" she snarled, wild with rage.

"You haven't the nerve to try it." The governess did not flinch. "I am not a helpless child nor an invalid. You nearly got away with deliberate murder before I came. But from this day on I warn you. There are still a few things of which your husband has never been informed."

And then with utmost coolness, Marie stepped out into the hall and closed the door behind her.

Alice was racing up and down her boudoir like a caged lioness. Her mental state bordered on temporary

insanity.

She hated Marie Desmond with all the vitriolic venom of a snake. And the worst of it was that she had no means of getting even with her.

But it was not only hatred that possessed her. Fear and apprehension also clutched her by the throat and made breathing difficult.

At last she threw herself upon the bed and broke into a fit of hysterical weeping.

Chapter 160

MRS. RUGGLES

E MUST now go back to the night of the Crawford reception. How it terminated was recounted in a preceding chater. Victor Talbot had a most loyal supporter and friend in the person of his housekeeper, Mrs. Ruggles. This splendid woman, a little past middle age, fairly worshipped her employer.

But all his employes did that. Only Mrs. Ruggles frequently played the part of a confidential adviser and a mother.

She had seen the seamy side of life and she fully appreciated the difficulties her young master encountered in winning the girl he loved for a wife.

She had advised Victor against attending the reception at the Crawford residence, but he had gone in spite of that.

A woman's intuition told her that some new trouble awaited Talbot, and for several hours she sat on the front veranda in gloomy silence.

There was some comfort in the knowledge that her employer was well able to take care of himself under any circumstances, and she finally succeeded in combating her worries on that score.

But it was not so easy to get her active mind under control, once it had started to work.

Against her inclination it insisted upon traveling along the path which led to days gone by. She saw herself again as a happy girl full of life and hope.

Her one mistake was when she became the wife of

a small caliber politician in the city of Cleveland where she was born and raised.

Tim Flaherty was the boss of his ward and he had not been the only one who courted the pretty Katherine Ruggles.

She had, in fact, suitors by the score, but Tim won out because he possessed the manly attributes the girl admired most.

Disappointments came quickly after a brief courtship and a hasty marriage.

And then Katherine, hurt to the core by her husband's neglect and habitual drunkeness, listened to the flattery of a man who at that time was the most talked of individual in Cleveland.

And thus she became the central figure in a tragedy which directly resulted in the greatest political clean-up propagated by any city in the United States.

"Big Bill" Bradford, as he was called by his admiring friends, had the city of Cleveland by its throat.

He constantly thirsted for more power, and his dealings with men who opposed him were as ruthless as they were crooked.

His most dangerous enemy was Judge Farrington, who refused to be bought. The enmity between these men reached a climax rather unexpectedly.

Judge Farrington had openly defied "Big Bill" Bradford, Cleveland's most powerful political leader.

One of the enterprising and wide-awake local newspapers with a vision exploded the news upon its astonished readers.

Exploded is the fitting word, for the information took the form of a journalistic bomb-shell which burst into innumerable headlines.

That the dignified and highly respected jurist should consent to run for Mayor of the city as the Peo-

ple's choice was in itself not so startling.

It was his fearless denunciation of Bradford whom he characterized as a crooked politician, grafter and known protector of the lawless element, which caused the sensation.

It was balm upon the outraged feelings of all decent citizens and a distinct shock to the man who for more than a decade had dictated every move in municipal affairs and whose vast wealth consisted largely of the toll systematically collected from those he favored and protected.

No man had ever dared to utter such drastic statements as Judge Farrington made repeatedly. Another election was coming.

It seemed like the handwriting on the wall when for the first time Bradford's candidates were defeated at the primaries.

His henchmen became panic-stricken and gathered around him in his private office where behind locked doors they discussed the situation.

Plans were made and discarded. "Big Bill" Bradford listened with a grim smile to the ideas advanced. They all realized that something must be done to silence the judge. But what?

Bradford's patience came to a sudden end and he dismissed his followers with the peremptory order:

"Send Flaherty to me. Tell him I want to see him at once."

Thirty minutes later Tim Flaherty presented himself. He entered the private office without stopping to be announced and he grinned when he found Bradford alone.

"You sent for me, Boss?" he asked.

Bradford looked intently at the man for some moments before replying. His eyes took in every detail

of Flaherty—the broad-shouldered figure, the Irish face with its square jaw and the keen gray eyes, now narrowed to mere slits—all surrounded by a shock of flaming red hair.

It was not an unattractive physiognomy and Flaherty's attitude was that of a man used to meeting people of consequence.

But what Bradford like most about this man was that he could be depended upon under any circumstances.

"Yes, I sent for you," growled the Boss at last, "because I want to talk to you about Judge Farrington."

"Well?" replied Flaherty as he seated himself lazily. His tone showed mild interest with just a trace of curiosity in it. "What about the judge?"

"You know what Farrington is trying to do, Tim," the other went on. "And you know also what it means to all of us if he succeeds. He must be stopped and it is up to you to do it."

"How?" the henchman asked laconically.

Bradford slanted an ugly glance at his visitor.

"You have an old score to settle with the judge," he said thickly. "He sent you up for five years once. I often wondered why you didn't. But you'll have to do something now. Use your own method and shut him up for keeps."

"You mean, Boss?" Their eyes hung on to each other for almost a full minute and the dreadful message was flashed.

"Exactly that," Bradford said in a subdued voice. "And you can make a haul worth while, Tim. He keeps a large amount of money in his private safe. Besides, he has enough silver plate to start a mint."

He paused for a moment, then added in a whisper: "It oftens happens that a man is shot trying to corner a burglar. Get me?"

"I got you alright," was Flaherty's retort. "Let me think this over a minute. By God, that is gunning after big game."

"You know it is," the Boss went on persuasively. "If you go through with it I'll give you a check for ten thousand."

"Ten thousand?" The henchman licked his lips. "By God, Boss you're on."

Without another word Bradford turned to his desk, wrote out the check and handed it to the man.

That he paid before Flaherty had completed his end of the bargain was but another indication how thoroughly he trusted him.

"It might be well for you to take a little trip somewhere after it is all over," Bradford suggested. "Run down to Cincinnati and stay there until I send for you."

"Alright, Boss."

Both men seemed anxious to terminate the interview.

Flaherty left quickly and proceeded in his usual business-like way. What information he required about the Farrington home he got during the day.

He waited impatiently for night to come. The clock in a nearby church spire had just struck the hour of twelve when he crawled through the forced window in the rear of the house.

Conditions favored him, for a storm broke. It rained, lightened and thundered alternately. After locating the safe in the judge's library, he began to drill, then inserted the charge.

A sharp thunderclap covered the muffled explosion. He found considerable money in currency which he hastily crammed into his pocket. The silverware he left untouched.

Flaherty took out his gun and examined it care-

fully. There was an evil smile on his face as he deliberately kicked over a chair, took a crouched position behind the door and waited.

From somewhere not far away came the shuffling of feet. The burglar straightened up, his gun ready. Someone had cautiously opened the door and felt for the button in the wall.

An instant later the room was flooded with light.

Not a moment too soon did Flaherty release the pressure on the trigger. Instead of meeting Judge Farrington he stood face to face with a sweet little girl of about six.

She looked so much like a beautiful angel with her long golden curls and flowing white nightrobe that he remained in mute admiration for a time.

This was so entirely unexpected that he found himself at a loss how to meet the situation.

His gun was lowered as she came toward him, unafraid and smiling. A customary oath trembled on the man's lips, but somehow he could not bring himself to profane the scene.

When the little girl's hand touched him, he winced.

"Are you a burglar?" she asked, still smiling with childish curiosity.

He gave an inarticulate grunt and began to retreat. She followed him.

"My daddy told me that burglars are bad men," the little girl went on. "But you don't look like a bad man. You have a nice face."

Flaherty made a quick move as if to flee, but the child's persistent smile seemed to hold him in check.

He gazed at her for a long moment and a strange expression came into his bleared eyes.

Way down in his heart a long-locked door opened and emotion entered unbidden. And with that emotion

came the sudden remembrance of other days.

For a long moment he stood like a man in a trance, then sank into a chair.

As the little girl came closer and showed an inclination to climb upon his knees, he reached out and assisted her. Once seated, she nestled her golden head against his broad bosom and a deep sigh escaped her lips.

"I like you," she told him frankly.

"And I like you," Flaherty responded, his face suddenly growing soft. "I had a sweet little girl like you once. She had hair just like yours and she——" he broke off abruptly and hugged her close.

The child freed herself from his embrace presently and looked up.

"Why, you are crying," she said wonderingly. "I can see tears on your cheeks."

He passed his hand hastily over his face.

"You are not happy," the child prattled on, her big baby eyes searching his sympathetically. "I never saw a big man cry before. Oh, yes, I did too," she corrected herself. "That was when the angels took my mama away. My daddy cried every day for a long time."

She endured the man's clumsy hug without protest. After another pause she said:

"Will you tell me a story?"

"I'll try, you little darling," Flaherty replied slowly. "But it has been a long time since I told any fairy tales. I'll do my best, so here goes: 'Once upon a time there lived a beautiful princess in a castle.

"'She had——'" and on he went, trying hard to recall the details of a story he dimly remembered having read when a boy in the second grade at school.

Flaherty had the first inkling that she was asleep when her head inclined toward him and finally sought a resting place against his breast. His brawny arms went

protectingly about her and he sat very quiet.

Suddenly the door opened, Judge Farrington, clad in a bathrobe, entered rapidly. He was unarmed.

"Dorothy!" he called, then stopped dead in his tracks.

Flaherty rose and deposited the sleeping little form gently in a big armchair.

Without uttering a word, the judge stood calmly, viewing the scene before him. His handsome face was blank with astonishment.

There was no need for an explanation on the part of Flaherty. The disordered room and the demolished safe told the story.

"Well, Tim," he said finally, "so you are up to your old tricks again. You know what this means. You won't get off with a five year sentence this time. It'll probably be life."

"I suppose it will, sir," the burglar retorted grimly, then looked at the sleeping child. "Do you know what would have happened to you had you come into this room before her? You would be a dead man now."

Judge Farrington's laugh was short-lived.

"Listen you!" Flaherty snorted viciously. "This burglar stunt was only a side issue. I am telling it to you straight. You are slated for the morgue. Bradford and his gang are after you. You know why.

"I came here to earn the money offered to the man who pulls the trick, but your little girl butted in and queered the whole business. That you are still alive now you owe to her."

Farrington's face had gone very white.

The sudden realization, the truth of it all came to him instantly. It was like a vivid yellow streak of lightning shorn of its danger by a safe distance.

"Here, take my gun and call the police," Flaherty

spoke again, his voice toned down. "Then put this little angel to bed. You needn't worry about my trying to make a get-away."

The judge took the gun and looked at it curiously. His gaze wandered to the sleeping child cuddled up in the big chair. He made no attempt to hide an emotion that almost overwhelmed him.

"Tim," he said, trying hard to swallow the great lump in his throat. "I hardly know what to make of this. I am not going to call the police. Nothing could be further from my mind just now. I was expecting some sort of trouble, but I never dreamed it would come to me this way.

"No doubt Bradford selected you to do the dirty work for him. And you fell down on the job because of my little girl." He swallowed once more, then burst out: "Good God, man, give me your hand."

Tim Flaherty held out his hand reluctantly. His face was averted. Judge Farrington strove with all his might to regain his composure.

"Now I want to talk to you, Tim," the latter went on as he drew up a chair. "What you did to-night has convinced me that there is still a lot of good in you or you never would have fallen for the innocent prattle of this child of mine.

"Your action expressed a most beautiful sentiment. This is one of the greatest moments in my life, and I believe it is the turning point in yours.

"I knew your father before he died, Tim," the speaker went on in a mellow tone. "He was an honest man. You were born an honest boy. You grew up and married a fine girl. Katherine Ruggles was the prettiest girl in the West end.

"And you two were happy together until——". The judge paused as he saw Flaherty wince. "I don't

like to speak about matters that are bound to hurt you, Tim. No doubt you never realized your mistake when you allowed Bradford to visit your home.

"Katherine disappeared one day and left you and your little girl. Then you got into bad company and it was my unpleasant duty to sentence you to prison. You promised to reform and you were paroled. Then you lost your little girl and you fell back into the old habit.

"You allied yourself with a man whom you should have shunned like a leper. Didn't you know that it was Bradford who——"

A hoarse cry cut the speaker short. Flaherty had bounded out of the chair, his face white as death and his eyes ablaze.

"Bradford?" he choked. "My God, did you say Bradford?"

"Yes, Bradford," Judge Farrington answered firmly. "I have the positive proof."

A space of intense silence followed. Tim's lean jaw was working visibly.

His mind had wandered swiftly back along the path of yesterday. A sudden light dawned upon him, and when he spoke his voice was deadly calm.

"What a blind fool I have been," he said. "And I thought that hound was my best friend. But I'll settle with him now. By God, in an hour from now Bradford will be a dead man. I'll make him pay."

"It is only just that he should pay," the judge replied. "But you must not take the law in your own hands, Tim. You can punish him far more severely by doing your share to expose him. And you will be rendering this city a tremendous service."

Flaherty was debating with himself. He strode to the other end of the room and returned.

"You did a noble thing to-night," Farrington con-

tinued. "It must have been the memory of your own little girl that influenced you. And because of that memory you took my child into your arms.

"It prevented you from becoming a murderer. I want to help you, Tim, and you can help me. Together we'll clean up this dear city of ours. Don't be afraid to tell the truth. I'll protect you all the way. I am still the presiding judge of the criminal section.

"Bradford and every one of his henchmen will be tried before me. Your testimony alone will convict them. Will you give it? Will you, Tim?"

There was some slight hesitation, then Flaherty nodded.

"Yes," he declared in a ringing tone. And Tim Flaherty was never known to break his word.

The following day Judge Farrington was very busy in his private office. Among those present were the prosecuting attorney, several detectives, a stenographer and Flaherty.

The latter made a clean breast of it all. The first man to be arrested was "Big Bill" Bradford. It created a sensation such as Cleveland had never experienced before.

There was a sudden stampede among Bradford's henchmen. Three of them were caught, however, and turned states evidence.

Sensation upon sensation followed and the newspapers were kept busy getting out extras. Bradford was sentenced for life, while several of his henchmen received twenty years at hard labor.

Flaherty made a vain attempt to find his erring wife. Since Bradford had been removed he had an idea

that Katherine would return to him. But nothing of the kind happened.

And then the inevitable took place. The unwritten law among crooks was evoked. Although "Big Bill" Bradford and his henchmen were in prison, a murderer previously hired did his work well, for Tim Flaherty was found by the police one morning lying in an alley and shot through the heart.

That was the end of Tim, but his widow's punishment had just begun. Ostracized and shunned by her former friends, Katherine left Cleveland. Before she had a chance to find new friends, she took ill.

It was then that her real punishment began. In addition to her physical pain she endured agonizing mental torture. She blamed herself for everything that had happened. Her heart yearned for the child which now lay under the sod.

But like so many other foolish women, Katherine realized her frightful mistake when it was too late.

So far as her departed husband was concerned, she had no regrets. Their married life had been a failure almost from the very beginning.

What hurt her most was the remorse for having abandoned her own flesh and blood.

As soon as she had recovered sufficiently to leave the hospital, she tried to find a suitable position. A mere shadow of her former self, and almost penniless, she was compelled to take what she could get.

For a while she scrubbed floors in one of the big office buildings. Again she fell ill and the doctors at the hospital advised her to get work in the country and stay there.

Fortune favored her, for a few days later she saw an advertisement which offered just about what she wanted.

The owner of a large estate outside of Chicago needed a housekeeper. In applying for the position, Katherine went back to her maiden name. She discarded the name of Flaherty and called herself "Mrs. Ruggles."

Thus she met Victor Talbot. Seven years of faithful service had won for her his esteem and gratitude.

Mrs. Ruggles, although not always successful, made a brave attempt to forget the past. It was only during sleepless nights when she sat alone on the front veranda, that unpleasant memories insisted upon returning.

Chapter 151

THE ARREST

FOR THE first time since her coming to the Talbot estate, Mrs. Ruggles insisted upon remaining up until her employer returned. She fought off sleep when it came by drinking several cups of strong black coffee. The room was so quiet that the ticking of the clock on the mantel annoyed her.

The striking of each hour gave her a shock. Her mental unrest became acute when the little hand pointed to one and the master of the house had not yet come.

Another long hour dragged by. All sorts of frightful possibilities passed through the woman's mind. Perhaps Victor Talbot had met with disaster of some sort. She shuddered as her imagination ran wild.

Finally, as the clock was about to strike three, she heard the dog bark. A moment later she saw someone come up the walk. The first glance told her that it was Mr. Talbot.

She ran into the hall and turned on the light, awaiting his entrance with her hands folded across her uneasy heart.

As he came in and the light fell upon his face, Mrs. Ruggles gave a start. She repressed a scream with difficulty.

The man's features were almost distorted. The white bosom of his shirt was soiled. He was without a hat, and his disheveled hair lay matted over his broad forehead.

"What — what has happened, Victor?" she gasped. "You look terrible."

Talbot did not reply to the question. A ghost of a smile flitted across his face as he stalked past Mrs. Ruggles into the kitchen.

She followed him, apprehension growing by leaps and bounds.

"Please make a strong cup of coffee," he said, dropping into a chair.

Mrs. Ruggles tactfuly refrained from asking any more questions. As she bent to the task of making the coffee, she shot a furtive glance now and then at her employer.

He sat there, apparently oblivious to what was going on about him. He did not stir until he was told that the coffee was ready.

He drank two cups in big gulps, then turned to the door.

"I am going to bed now, Mrs. Ruggles," he announced. "Please see to it that I am not disturbed. Tell Warner to take care of things."

"Yes, sir," she answered, her lips quivering.

As he walked up the stairs, his feet dragging, Mrs. Ruggles became more and more convinced that something terrible had happened.

"Oh, why did he not listen to me," she whispered to herself. "I just feel he had trouble at the Crawford reception. That woman is crazy about him, and he is dead gone on that pretty stepdaughter of hers. This thing is going to end in a tragedy, see if it don't."

She put out the lights then went up to her room to get some sleep. At the usual hour, however, she was busy in the kitchen again.

George Warner, the manager of affairs on the Talbot estate during Victor's absence, arrived a little after seven o'clock. He walked into the kitchen obviously excited.

"Have you heard the news, Mrs. Ruggles?" he asked, out of breath.

The woman instantly began to tremble.

"No, what—what is it, George?" she countered.

"They found Roger Hawkins shot dead, in a ditch along the road this morning," Warner told her.

For a long moment the woman stood speechless.

"What?" she gasped at last.

"Yes, somebody killed that city dude," came back.

Mrs. Ruggles' eyes widened with horror. She was thinking about the man who slept upstairs. Could it be possible that her employer had committed the crime.

She had more than a vague suspicion that this was the case, but she put the idea out of her mind resolutely. Victor Talbot was not a murderer.

"Who told you about it, George?" she inquired, fidgeting with her apron.

"I passed one of Mrs. Crawford's hired hands on the way here," was the retort. "He told me all the details. The doctor who was called pronounced Mr. Hawkins dead, and then the police were sent for."

"Isn't that awful?" the woman remarked in a low tone. "Who would have thought that such a thing could happen in a peaceful neighborhood like this."

Warner glanced at her significantly.

"Do you know," he said in a guarded voice, "it wouldn't surprise me if Mr. Talbot was accused of the murder. For some time there has been bad blood between him and Mr. Hawkins.

"It is all about Lillian Crawford. I am inclined to believe that our boss——"

Mrs. Ruggles stopped him with a vehement gesture.

"Don't say it, George!" she cried. "Don't even think it. Mr. Talbot could not be guilty of deliberate

murder. Why, he is the finest man in the world."

Warner nodded.

"So he is," he acquiesced. "But you know as well as I do that Mr. Talbot has a terrible temper when he is aroused. That man Hawkins was trying to get Miss Crawford away from him. Everybody knew that. It is not impossible to assume....."

"Now you hush right up," Mrs. Ruggles interrupted. "You, of all men, to talk like this. You ought to be ashamed of yourself to cast suspicion upon Mr. Talbot. Why, he hasn't an enemy in the world."

George Warner was not anxious to fall into disfavor with Mrs. Ruggles who had more influence with the master of the house than any of the other servants.

He also felt a little ashamed of himself for having harbored such thoughts in connection with the Roger Hawkins' murder.

"Well," he said in a lighter tone, "I suppose the police will find the guilty one without much trouble. They have a good clue to work on, for a rifle was found lying near the scene of the crime."

"Who has that rifle now?" she demanded.

"I don't exactly know the person who has it, but it was taken by the man who found it to the Crawford residence. No doubt it will be turned over to the police as soon as they come."

Mrs. Ruggles did not show any inclination to discuss the subject further. When Warner inquired about Mr. Talbot's whereabouts she replied:

"He is not feeling so well this morning. He told me to tell you to take charge of things. And please, George," she added in a pleading tone, "be careful what you say to our men and neighboring farmers. Don't cast suspicion on Mr. Talbot. He is our best friend."

Continued in next number

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